EPIGRAPHICAL NOTES

By

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I

A NOTE ON NALANDA PLATE OF DHARMAPĀLADEVA

This copper plate was found in 1927-28, lying among the debris in the north veranda of monastery no. 1 at Nalanda.

It has been discussed by Hiranand Shastri in the *Annual Report on the Archæological Survey of India*, 1927-28, p. 138; by B. N. Bhattacharya in the *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 23, 1940, pp. 290-292; and by Hiranand Shastri in "*Nalanda and Its Epigraphic Material*", 1942, pp. 84-85.

The document records the gift of a village Uttarāma near the village of Niguha, belonging to Jambunadi *vithi*, in the Gaya viṣaya of the Nagarabhukti. The beneficiary is apparently a Buddhist monk, whose name begins with "Dharmma".

The Jambunadi referred to in the record is now known as the Jamun which flows northwards, to the west of Gaya town and joins the Morhar near Jehanabad.

But the villages are not situated near this river. They are, in fact, situated beyond much bigger rivers than the Jamun, viz, the Dardha, and the Morhar. The present names of Niguha and Uttarāma villages are, Nighwan and Utrawan respectively, both being situated near the police station of Kurtha.

These epigraphical particulars have some value in determining the meaning of the term '*vithi*'. Since it is likely that the present Jamun river was then known as the Jambunadi, it follows that 'Jambunadi *vithi*' did not mean that tract which was situated along the banks of the river but was larger included the river itself while taking the river's name. The *vithi* was a part of a district, i.e. a subdivision, named apparently after one of the rivers flowing through it and not necessarily the biggest river traversing it. A possible explanation can be that at that time the smaller river had greater cultivation along its banks.

It is noteworthy that in this copper plate grant occurs the expression : "*Nagara-bhuktau Gayā-viṣ-y-antahpati-Jamvu (mbu)-nadi-vithi-prativa(ba)ddha-Niguha-grām-āsanna U-ttarāma-grāmake*". In other words, the village Uttarāma has defined as being near the village Niguha, implying thereby that Niguha was more important at that time. This holds good even to-day—Niguha or Nighawan has more population and cultivable area, and pays more taxes than village Uttarāma or modern Utrawan.

The fact that the donated village, Uttarāma was described as "near the village Niguha", was probably, due to there being many other villages of that name.

Village Nighawan bears Thana no. 167 and village Utrawan Thana no. 169 of Kurtha Revenue Thana. Their area and the recoverable rent as also population are noted below—

Sl. No.	Name of the village/ thana	Population	Area	Rent	Cess	Education Cess.	Total
1.	Nighawan 167	2043	1489.49	6988.07	416.26	416.26	7820.59
2.	Utrawan 169	750	296.92	1533.21	95.29	95.29	1723.29

II

THE NANDAPUR COPPER PLATE

The Nandapur copper plate grant of the Gupta year 169 of 458 A. D. was published by N. G. Mazumdar in *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 52-26. The following conclusions were submitted by him—

(1) The copper plate comes from the village Nandapur which lies on the southern bank of the Ganges and at a distance of about two miles to the north-east of Surajgarha in Monghyr district. The plate was said to have been fixed to the wall of a niche in a dilapidated temple.

(2) The charter was issued from a village called Ambila. It records the purchase of four *kulyavāpas* of fallow land in the village of

Jungoyikā at the rate of two *dinaras* per *kulyavāpa*, by the Viṣayapati Chhattramāha, and its transfer as gift to a Brāhmaṇa of village Jungoikā in order to enable him to perform the five great sacrifices. The name of the donee, ending in "svāmin", could not be made out with certainty. He was an inhabitant of Nandavithi and Khatāpuraṇa-agrahāra. The land donated was bounded on the south, by the plot given away to Gorakṣita; and on the west, by the land known as Gopālibhoga.

(3) In the transaction, the Viṣayapati Chhattramāha himself was the applicant and appeared before the Adhikaraṇa to secure the plot of land by means of a tāmra-patra. The matter was enquired into and reported on by the Record Keepers (pushtapāla), Pradyotasimha and Bandhudāsa.

Mazumdar further stated, "That the document was drafted, engraved and issued from Bengal, or more precisely from North Bengal, follows not only from the nature of the script but also from the close agreement of its pharseology with that of Baigram and other plates of this century, discovered in North Bengal. Moreover, from the mention of 8 by 9 *nalas*, and the standard cubic length of *darvvi karmma*, the conclusion becomes irresistible that the land that was so measured and given away, must have belonged to the same region, although the donee himself resided at Nandapur in the Monghyr district of Bihar."

2. I would venture to modify these conclusions in two respects—

(a) It is evident that neither Mazumdar who published the copper-plate grant nor Chakravarti who was then editing the *Epigraphia Indica*, gave a correct translation of the first two lines which read as follows—

1. "*Svasty* = *Amvi* (*mbi*) *la-grām-agraharāt* = *sa-viśvāsam* = *adhikaraṇam* (*nam*) *Jungoyikā Brāhmaṇ-ottaran* = *samvyavahā—*

2. "*ry-adi-kuṭumvi*(*mbi*)*naḥ kuśalam* = *anuvarṇya bodhayanti* (*ti*)*likhanti*(*ti*)*cha* (!*) *Vijña ayatinah viṣayapati—Chhattramāhaḥ*"

Mazumdar's translation was, "Hail! From the (royal) grant (agrahāra) of Ambila village our head of the district (viṣayapati) Chhattramāha, with confidence intimates, addresses in writing and informs the great (adhikaraṇa), as well as the Brāhmaṇas, the chief officers and others and also the house holders, at the village of Jungoyikā after having enquired about their well-being."

Chakravarti's translation is, "From......Ambila (the ayutakas) .. intimate and write to (*bodhyanti likhanti cha*) the Court that Viṣayapati Chhattramāha informs us.........."

Actually, the subject of this sentence is neither the Viṣayapati Chhattramāha, (as assumed by Mazumdar inspite of the plural *bodhayanti* and *likhanti*) nor the *Ayuktas* (as assumed by Chakravarti, although there is no reference to them in the coppoer plate). The subject is, "Samvyavahāryadikuṭumvi (mbi) nah," viz. the Samvyavahāris and Kuṭumbins. These parties had gone to the *agrahāra* situated at village *Ambila.* The expression 'agraharāt' may be compared with the use of "skandhavarāt". They are addressing the text recorded on this copper plate to the Brahmins etc. of village Jungoyikā. They have made this reference to those Brahmins after 'intimating their own welfare, (*kuśalam anuvarṇya*). According to usual contemporary style, this reference was being made with confidence, "Saviśvāsam".

It is these parties before whom an application was made (vijñāpayati naḥ) by the District Officer, Chhattramāha.

Since the District Officer himself was the applicant, he submitted his application before the other parties, who, otherwise, along with him, would normally have constituted the authority to deal with such applications for purchase and assignment of fallow land.

To whom were the Samvyavahāris and Kuṭumbins reporting with confidence ? To the Adhikaraṇa or the office—presumably, of the Viṣayapati or the District Officer himself.

Thus it was that although the District Officer was the applicant, he had not only to pay for the land after ascertaining the customary price and satisfying those concerned that it was fallow land, unproductive of any taxes, etc. The application was dealt with by the other members of the authority which dealt with such matters. Besides this compliance with ordinary procedure, the usual office, viz. his own office was also addressed. I do not think that the *adhikaraṇa* was that of the officer incharge of the province or the *bhukti.*

3. The transaction took place during the reign of Budhagupta ; and closely resembles records of other donations of land issued in that emperor's reign. The principal point of interest lies in the fact that although the District Officer himself was the applicant, he had to comply

rigidly with all points of the standard procedure. This reflects to what extent the normal rules could not be by-passed even by the privileged.

4. The *viṣaya* or the district has not been named in the grant—the transaction was complete and required no reference to any outside authority.

The *viṣaya* must have been the Krimilā district of Śrīnagara Bhukti.

The donee was resident of Nandapur, not far away from the district headquarters, the distance between Nandapur and Krimilā (Kiul) being only a few miles.

5. The southern and eastern boundaries of the land in village Jungoyikā have been mentioned as presumably, on the east and north there was a river. Jungoyikā might be present-day Jamui, and Khaṭapurāṇa, village Khaṭa near Barhi. The village Ambila I am not able to locate. If it were in the neighbourhood of the district headquarters at Krimilā or Kibila, then the *agrahāra* where the parties had gone to put their direction in acceptable form to the Brahmins of village Jungoyikā, might be or close to, Krimilā itself.

6. In these circumstances, I am unable to subscribe to the view that, "The land that was so measured and given away must have also belonged to" North Bengal."

It has been generally found that when land was donated in favour of an individual, it was nearly always not far from the place where the donee himself resided. Distance introduced complications, then as now.

The anxiety of the donee to avoid trouble with the local Brahmins in village Jungoyikā by getting a direction addressed to them as well as to the *Adhikaraṇa* by the concerned authorities, is another point of interest in this transaction.